

Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award Nomination for the 2025 Prize

Mitali Perkins

United States Board on Books for Young People



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Grounds for Nomination

Mitali Perkins has crafted books for kids from preschool to teen since 1993, providing American readers of South Asian descent much-needed mirrors, and paving the way for new generations of South Asian writers. The recipient of numerous awards, she has also judged the National Book Award and written for adults on the importance of children's literature. Perkins embodies the ideals of the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award, writing with imagination and empathy while maintaining artistic excellence.



Brief Biography

Mitali Bose Perkins was born in Kolkata, India, and lived in India, Ghana, Cameroon, London, New York City, and Mexico City before settling in the San Francisco Bay area when she was in middle school. This early experience of crossing borders made her feel “culturally homeless,” and much of her writing explores code-switching across cultures and generations.

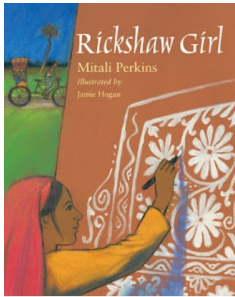
After studying political science at Stanford and public policy at U.C. Berkeley, Perkins taught in middle school, high school, and college before turning to writing fiction. Perkins’s books—from picture books through YA novels—grapple with nuances of justice in issues such as child trafficking, wildlife poaching, international adoption, affordable housing, and microfinancing.

Her work regularly receives starred reviews and has been praised as “unforgettable,” “intimate and absorbing,” “funny, honest,” and containing “surprises that continue to the end.” Her 2017 YA novel, *You Bring the Distance Near*, was nominated for the National Book Award for Young People’s Literature, and *Rickshaw Girl* was adapted into a movie.

Mitali means “friendly” in Bangla, and she tries to live up to her name. While people assume she is an extrovert, however, she says, “My tagline should read, ‘Hermit who loves people.’”



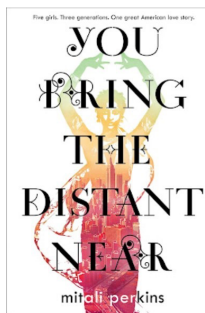
Three Prominent Books



Rickshaw Girl

Charlesbridge, 2007

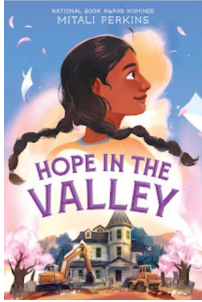
“Stop and *think* before you act,” Mother often reminds ten-year-old Naima—and she tries. Naima is careful with her chores, especially while cleaning the beautiful rickshaw her father borrowed so much money to buy. Father carries passengers from dawn until midnight but doesn’t earn enough to pay back the rickshaw and certainly not enough for Naima to continue going to school along with her younger sister. Naima’s talent at painting traditional patterns, or *alpanas*, may help her win the village contest, but the prize of paper and paints won’t solve anything. If only she had been a boy, as she overhears her mother lament. Then she could have helped pull the rickshaw like their neighbor’s son. Or, imagines Naima, maybe she could dress up like a boy! On impulse she test-drives the rickshaw before asking for her parents’ permission, but when it picks up speed, she loses control, and the rickshaw careens into the bushes. The gleaming new rickshaw is now scratched and dented. Now how will the family make a living? Perkins’s moving, immediate story draws readers into Naima’s predicament. The hopeful ending explores how the changing role of women and the introduction of microfinance can improve the economic status of poor Bangladeshi families like Naima’s.



You Bring the Distant Near

Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2017

Beginning in 1965 and ending in 2006, this saga of the Das family is told in alternating voices across three generations: sisters Tara and Sonia; their mother, Ranee; and their daughters, Anna and Chantal. Ranee worries that her children are losing their Indian culture; Sonia, is wrapped up in a forbidden biracial love affair; Tara seeks the limelight to hide her true self; Shanti tries to make peace in the family; Anna fights to preserve Bengal tigers and her Bengali identity. The novel is structured in three sections that follow the family’s identity as they immigrate from one country to another and develop from “Strangers” to “Travelers” to “Settlers.” Perkins features a cross-continental family much like her own, breathing life into vibrant characters who contend with issues of race and identity in what is ultimately a love story.



Hope in the Valley

Farrar, Straus Giroux, 2023

Silicon Valley, 1980. Twelve-year-old Indian American Pandita Paul, who is quiet and doesn't like change, plans to spend her summer the way she did last year: reading and writing at the abandoned mansion across the street. She and Ma used to secretly visit it before Ma died three years ago on a trip to India to see her parents. When the town announces plans to tear down the mansion to make room for new housing, Pandita joins the historical society's fight to preserve it. Meanwhile, Pandita's older sister joins a group planning to buy the property to build the affordable housing the community so desperately needs. As Pandita sorts through the boxes of paperwork the demolition crew passed on to the historical society, Pandita uncovers a history of anti-Asian sentiment in the valley and a movement to "keep California white" that parallels the current opposition to the construction of affordable housing. Drawing on her own childhood experiences—and including her own poetry from seventh grade—Perkins creates complicated and interesting characters who grapple with an important issue, while also delivering an entertaining and heartwarming story.

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(ordered from most recent to oldest; international publication information indicated where appropriate, with translated titles and translators where available)

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Website:

<https://www.mitaliperkins.com/>



Books to Be Sent to Jury

Bamboo People

Forward Me Back to You

Home Is in Between

Hope in the Valley

Monsoon Summer

Open MIC: Riffs on Life Between Cultures in Ten Voices

Rickshaw Girl

Tiger Boy

You Bring the Distant Near

Supporting Information

Honors & Prizes

Listed in reverse chronological order, with specific books indicated where appropriate. Links are to the appropriate URL.

- 2023 [Calvin Center for Faith & Writing inaugural Distinguished Writer-in-Residence](#)
- 2021 [N.S.K. Neustadt Prize for Children's Literature](#) , Finalist
- 2020 [South Asia Book Award, Older Readers](#) , for *Forward Me Back to You*
- 2020 [Américas Award](#) , for *Between Us and Abuela*
- 2020 [Charlotte Huck Award, Honor](#) , for *Between Us and Abuela*
- 2020 [Rise: A Feminist Book Project Top Ten](#) for *Forward Me Back to You*
- 2018 [National Book Award juror](#)
- 2018 [Walter Award, Teen, Honor](#) , for *You Bring the Distant Near*
- 2018 [South Asia Book Award, Older Readers](#) , for *You Bring the Distant Near*
- 2018 [Neev Book Award for Young Readers](#) , for *Tiger Boy*
- 2017 [National Book Award for Young People's Literature, Longlist](#) , for *You Bring the Distant Near*
- 2016 [South Asia Book Award, Younger Readers](#) , for *Tiger Boy*
- 2016 [Charlotte Huck Award, Honor](#) , for *Tiger Boy*
- 2016 [Notable Books for a Global Society](#) , for *Tiger Boy*
- 2011 [Notable Books for a Global Society](#) , for *Bamboo People*
- 2010-11 [Asian/Pacific American Librarians Association Award for Children's Literature, Honor](#), for *Bamboo People*
- 2010 [Notable Books for a Global Society](#) , for *Secret Keeper*
- 2008 [Jane Addams Children's Book Award, Honor](#) , for *Rickshaw Girl*
- 2008 [Notable Books for a Global Society](#) , for *Rickshaw Girl*

Notable Interviews

Listed in reverse chronological order. Links are to the full text.

“ I try not to be heavy-handed with those identities because I want to leave a lot of room for the reader’s imagination to intersect with those characters. *Secret Keeper* was set in 1970s India and had all Indian characters. I got a letter from a girl in Iowa on a dairy farm who read the book seven times. When you’re reading a book, it becomes your story.”

With [Publishers Weekly](#), 20 June 2023

“ In most of my books, I try to give my young readers dignity and space to think for themselves when it comes to justice and goodness.”

With [“Fuse#8,”](#) 20 June 2023

“All fiction crosses borders – we are adults writing about children, men writing about women, women writing about men, etc. If it features a character who is exactly like us, it becomes memoir. Writing fiction isn’t about whether we cross borders, it’s about which ones, and why, and how.”

With [“Mirrors Windows Doors,”](#) 2 April 2015

“ I write about the things I care about, but hope that the story stands alone as a darn good yarn, despite my desire to create social awareness about an issue.”

With [“Writers Rumpus,”](#) 29 May 2015

“ Stories were my solace in stressful times. As an oft-displaced young person, I made myself at home in books and sunk roots into fictional places. I know firsthand how stories shape the human heart during childhood and adolescence, so it was a bit of a no-brainer for me—who wouldn’t want one of the most powerful vocations on the planet?”

With [“Cynsations,”](#) June 2008

Praise

Listed in reverse chronological order. Links are to the full text where available.

“In trying to save the place she and her mother loved, the 13-year-old embarks on a journey that takes her down pathways of memory of earlier inhabitants of the Johnson house and the region. In doing so, Pandu gives wings to her words and her voice. There's poetry here, along with literature and lots of culinary heritage, all combining in a deeply compelling read.”

— [Kirkus Reviews on *Hope in the Valley*](#), 11 April 2023

“If ever the intricate complexities of immigrant families living between homelands were in doubt—if there was some misconceived notion of a cookie-cutter experience when navigating borders and integrating cultures—Perkins has laid those doubts unquestionably to rest in an ambitious narrative that illuminates past and present, departure and reunion, women and family.”

—Anastasia M. Collins in *Horn Book* on *You Bring the Distant Near*, 26 Sept. 2017

“Fast-paced action, lots of references to the local flora and fauna, and clearly laid-out moral dilemmas come together in a satisfying way.”

—Robin Smith in *Horn Book* on *Tiger Boy*, Fall 2015

“Dialogue and descriptions are vibrant; characters are memorable; cultural characteristics are smoothly incorporated; and the story is well paced. Perkins has infused her narrative with universal themes that will inspire readers to ponder humanitarian issues, reasons for ethnic conflict, and the effects of war. The author's notes provide helpful background information on Burmese history and the ongoing military regime's repression of minorities.”

—Gerry Larson in *School Library Journal* on *Bamboo People*, 1 July 2010

“A child-eye's view of Bangladesh that makes a strong and accessible statement about heritage, tradition and the changing role of women, Naima's story will be relished by students and teachers alike.”

— [Kirkus Reviews on *Rickshaw Girl*](#), 1 Dec. 2006

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